

Yuma District One honored for its self-built technology program

By Amy Crawford, Yuma Sun staff writer | Posted 7 days ago

District One's iTEAM KiDS Technology Ambassador program was named one of 33 districts of distinction from across the U.S. by magazine District Administration in its March issue.

The program harnesses kids' innate curiosity about technology.

"What do people do when they get new technology? They give it to their kid to help them figure it out," said Darwin Stiffler, superintendent at District One, in explaining the program.

The program is a before- or after-school session for third through eighth-graders in which kids learn about new technology, and then prepare themselves to support their peers and teachers by immersing themselves in it, said Christa Fairman, the iTEAM KID's coordinator. Students were also present at the district's annual professional development day.

Kids learn digital citizenship, technology skills and standards, interpersonal communication, public speaking skills and more, Fairman said.

But the road to finding a student-led professional development program wasn't easy, she noted.

In the summer of 2014, Fairman said she was searching for a way to help kids integrate technology into the classroom as the district was looking to implement a 1:1 initiative in the fall of 2015, according to the iTEAM KiDS website. The district also needed a STEM program to help meet standards.

Returning from the 2014 International Society for Technology in Education Conference in Atlanta, Fairman said she came to the conclusion that the district was going to have to invent a program itself.

"In 2014, I came back from ISTE saying 'I'm not getting what we need.' We just have to do it. We're just going to have to do it and learn as we go."

Fairman, collaborating with the district's grant writer, Terry Lowe, and many others, was able to get the program conceived, funded, and implemented in 15 District One schools within 90 days, she said.

By January 2015, all 17 schools in the district were in the program, Fairman said. In the fall of 2015, three of District One's middle schools added the iTEAM KiDS program as an elective, according to the District Administration journal.

Partners in the program include the Helio Education Foundation, the Department of Defense Education Activity, CISCO Systems, Generation Yes, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Science Foundation Arizona, and the Yuma County Superintendent of Schools office.

At least three students from each grade (third through eighth) participate with a teacher that Fairman calls an "iNSTRUCTOR" three times per week. Using video conferencing, Fairman is able to interact with all the groups at one time to ensure curriculum standards.

At the highpoint of enrollment for this year, the program had 275 students in it, Fairman said.

"What's great about this program -- is it's making a difference," Stiffler said.

And that's why District Administration has chosen District One as a District of Distinction, Stiffler noted.